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ABSTRACT

In light of demands from our rapidly changing society, the need to revitalize and renovate teacher education through competency-based programs is long overdue. We cannot hope to attain the high level of competency needed in our professional reading programs if we are to continue in our traditional demands for cognitive skills without application to children in our instructional processes. Inservice teacher education programs also have a growing responsibility for providing reading teachers with more than the conventional facts and theories of reading that they may or may not have received in their earlier training. Perhaps one of the most vigorous and far reaching efforts in the 1970's to raise the current standards of inservice and continuing education for those who teach reading is found in the International Reading Association's Competency-Based Teacher Education Model. The 17 components listed are referred to as resource modules and can be divided into instructional modules for use in inservice, graduate, or undergraduate programs. Educational institutions must be ready to reach beyond traditional programs of inservice and preservice instruction if we are to succeed in our thrust toward excellence in educational programs for teachers of reading. (Author/WR)

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# RAISING STANDARDS THROUGH COMPETENCY-BASED INSERVICE EDUCATION

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# RAISING STANDARDS THROUGH COMPETENCY-BASED INSERVICE EDUCATION

## Introduction

If educational institutions, like automobile manufacturers could afford the luxury of recalling their defective or minimal quality products as they pass through our educational assembly lines, reading specialists might well be spared the ominous task of rushing out to the scene of the accident in a last frantic effort to revive the intellectual and emotional remains of those who have had the misfortune of colliding with the hordes .. of teachers who fail in their daily task to develop literacy. (9)

As Heilman points out:

> "Learning to read is probably one of the most important accomplishments that the child will achieve during his formal schooling... if he fails in reading, the frustrations and defeats which can beset him in the future are so numerous and varied that they have never been tabulated in one source." (4)

Reading instruction in the United States and Canada has seldom been without its critics, yet it cannot be denied that considerable progress has been made over the years. However, as we review the current trends in educational institutions we cannot help but concede that ... "improvement of reading instruction is still a major concern in education." (11)

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Weaknesses in Conventional Inservice - Preservice Programs

Among several of the short-comings frequently cited against traditional training institutions is the cry that teacher preparation is often too brief and abstract. Because most teachers are able to graduate from our educational institutions with a minimum of exposure to reading - one, or at the best two courses, their limited knowledge of reading skills, diagnosis, methods, and materials, prevents them from providing the instructional expertise they so desperately need in solving the numerous reading problems which they later encounter with children.

Complaints of "theory oriented" courses void of classroom involvement are not without foundation. Too frequently students are "shunted off" to begin their practice teaching - as late as their senior year, without ever having had previous "on the job" practice with children. Preparation for this crucial phase of the program through conventional means has failed to produce the essential teaching proficiencies later needed, since programs of this nature have not been based upon behavioral objectives toward which to focus instruction, demonstrate competency, and assess achievement. (8 )

We cannot hope to attain the high level of competency needed in our professional reading programs if we are to continue in our traditional demands for cognitive skills without application to children in our instructional processes. For the earlier and more frequently the learner becomes involved in working with

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children in applying and assessing the theory he has learned, the better is his opportunity to grow in competence. ( 7 )

Inservice programs too have a growing responsibility for providing teachers of reading with more than the conventional facts and theories of reading that they may or may not have received in their earlier training ... "for knowing about a problem or a solution to a problem is not equivalent to successfully applying that solution." ( 1 )

Weaknesses in Conventional Inservice Programs

Unfortunately the term "inservice education" is not likely to conjure up great bursts of enthusiasm, even among the most dedicated teachers. Although most inservice programs are desparately needed they are severly inadequate. These inadequaces might be attributed to the fact that: 1) activities are often selected without regard for purpose to be achieved; 2) programs fail to relate inservice programs to genuine needs of staff members; 3) program planners and directors who design and conduct inservice activities often lack the professional skills and knowledge to assure effectiveness; 4) planners fail to provide identifiable objectives and are unable to differentiate between activities and objectives; ( 3) and, 5) little or no assessment of teacher learning is provided so teachers often sit passively with little incentive to learn.

These apparent weaknesses in our traditional inservice programs clearly indicate that there is a real ... "need to

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relate preservice and inservice education, not only more effectively, but to develop systematic teacher education programs that consider the training problems of teachers from the time they decide to become teachers to the time they retire from the profession." (5)

There is clearly a need to consider an alternate solution in our search to raise standards of reading instruction in our schools today. It is for this reason that a competency -based approach to inservice education is proposed in this paper.

## What a Competency - Based Inservice Program Is

Perhaps one of the most vigorous and far reaching efforts in the seventies to raise the current standards of inservice and continuing education for those who teach reading was formulated by the IRA's Commission on High Quality Education in their recent publication entitled: Modular Preparation for Teaching Reading.

An examination of the IRA Competency - Based Teacher Education Model reveals that it is comprised of seventeen essential components recommended by the Commission for program improvement.

The components identified are the following:

1. Understanding the English Language as a Communication System
2. Interaction with Parents and the Community
3. Instructional Planning: Curriculum and Approaches
4. Developing Language Fluency and Perceptual Abilities in Early Childhood
5. Continued Language Development in Social Settings
6. Teaching Word-Attack Skills

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7. Developing Comprehension: Analysis of Meaning
8. Developing Comprehension: Synthesis and Generalization
9. Developing Comprehension: Information Acquisition
10. Developing Literary Appreciation: Young Children
11. Developing Literary Appreciation: Latency Years
12. Developing Literary Appreciation: Young Adults
13. Diagnostic Evaluation of Reading Progress
14. School and Classroom Organization for Diagnostic Teaching
15. Adapting Instruction to Varied Linguistic Backgrounds
16. Treatment of Special Reading Difficulties
17. Initiating Improvements in School Programs (7)

The seventeen components listed are referred to as resource modules, and can be divided into instructional modules for use in inservice, graduate or undergraduate programs. Each resource module contains a developmental sequence of learnings at three levels to provide for individual differences. The most fundamental competencies, appropriate for the novice or inexperienced teacher are found at the Professional Entry Level. The Advanced Level would apply to those persons who continue their graduate and inservice study. Emphasis here is on a more masterly classroom performance. Research is utilized to support educational practices and decisions. The most sophisticated level of competency required by reading specialists, research personnel, and university teachers would be found at the Specialization Level. Competencies at this level are directed toward experimentation for solutions to educational programs and leadership.

With the assistance of instructional leadership in schools, teachers can be guided in assessing their competencies so that appropriate portions of each module needed to improve individual

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capabilities in inservice programs can be implemented, thus assuring a more continuous improvement of reading instruction.

The five essential components of a module include: (1) a preparticipation assessment plan - used to identify the learner's proper placement of existing knowledge and skills for the module; 2) a list of teacher competencies - necessary for the acquisition of the module - written in precise behavioral statements on the objectives of the module; 3) a list of criterion behaviors used to measure the degree of achievement or attainment in a particular competency in terms of several kinds of behaviors, such as: (a) valuing (b) understanding (c) applying (d) analyzing-changing: (4) learning experiences - a suggested list of optional sources or means for use in acquiring the competency; (5) continuing assessment - a means for determining whether a criterion behavior has been successfully mastered. (7 )

What a Competency-Based Program Can Do

Competency based models, when incorporated into ongoing inservice programs can be of value for the following reasons:

1. Assures the inclusion of all essential elements of an adequate reading education program.
2. Assures that regular classroom teachers, as well as specialists, have a thorough grounding in the teaching of reading.
3. Provides classroom performance competencies in teaching as well as knowledge competencies.
4. Provides a variety of ideas for teaching teachers in assessing their mastery of desired competencies.
5. Provides an approach to greater individualization of preservice and inservice programs.

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6. Provides detailed objectives of visible evidence of the need to increase the amount of time spent on the reading preparation of most elementary and secondary teachers. (7 ) 34-35

Since the preparation of excellent teachers of reading cannot be achieved in a short period of time, ongoing educational instruction must be planned into meaningful segments of experiencies for inclusion in inservice programs.

In order to provide for viable programs,- compatable with the needs of children, teachers and community, the implementation of a modularized approach in a school setting requires first, that instructional leaders assist faculty members assess their own reading instruction competencies. This can be done through the use of self-assessment check lists based on modular content. Each member evaluates his own competency in relation to those listed. Faculty members then meet to identify and discuss their own professional needs in terms of the school's reading problems. Modules or modular segments are finally selected and assigned for the purpose of providing immediate solutions to existing problems and promoting professional growth and development in reading instruction. A series of concurrent inservice educational experiences would be included as a vital part of this program to insure the kinds of learning experiences suggested by the module.

If faculty members elect to participate as a group in selecting and working on a particular module, individual staff members would be appropriately assigned to work with groups

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commensurate with their educational experience and background. Here the emphasis would be on providing for continuous learning and professional development at every level of competence in joint effort to solving classroom problems (ED) ... "not only should this process produce more effective teachers, but it should also encourage research into alternative approaches to inservice" ... instructional programs. ( 2 )

Examples of Competency-Based Inservice Program

The examples provided herein are designed to familarize the reader with the basic components of a module as described earlier in this paper. (pp.5-6)

1. Pre-participation assessment: Measurement of both knowledge and performance abilities. The inservice leader should include one or more techniques for assessment such as: oral tests, written tests, self-assessment check lists, videotape demonstration, demonstration teaching, and other means as deemed appropriate.

11. Teacher Competencies: Statements written in precise behavioral terms which identify the capabilities needed at each level of achievement, and which can be used for further development in inservice work and study. Examples of competencies at the advanced level might include:

* 1. Demonstrates a familiarity with several handwriting methods (including method currently taught),- describes differences in philosophy, letter formation, drills, and special features.
2. Knows provisions that should be made for left-handed child.

* Examples taken from Module Four: "Developing Perceptual Abilities and Language Fluency in Early Childhood", Modular Preparation for Teaching Reading, IRA Publication 1973, p. 96

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III. Criterion Behaviors: The behaviors that provide evidence of competency attainment. Several criterion behaviors should be included for each competency. Any two of these examples would be appropriate for the competency listed above.

1. Presents a written summary
2. Shows models to inexperienced teachers and demonstrates method
3. Prepares an illustrated bulletin

IV. Learning Experiences: Various sources or tasks listed where the learner can obtain knowledge and skill to fulfill the competency. Examples provided are appropriate for advanced competency listed above.

1. Reference reading
2. Study writing models
3. Study manuals for writing systems
4. Practice with left-handed pupils.

Other learning experiences appropriate for inservice programs might include:

1. Prepare a detailed case study on one child
2. Try a recently learned instructional technique in the classroom and assess pupil growth.

V. Continuing Assessment: The process of continuous measurement of the on-going progress made by the learner in carrying out criterion behaviors.

Continuing assessment "tools" may include the same techniques as those used in pre-participation such as: tests, quizzes, observations of performance, analysis of preparation for performance, simulated teaching with peers as observed by instructor or peer evaluator, and other means.

Examples of Teacher Competencies, Criterion Behaviors and Learning Experiences at Three Levels (Entry, Advanced and Specialization)

Module Four *

Developing Perceptual Abilities and Language Fluency in Early Childhood

| Competencies | Criterion Behaviors | Learning Experiences |
|---|---|---|
| Helps children to perceive and articulate speech sounds | | |
| Entry Level<br>1. Recognizes that ability to descriminate and articulate certain consonant sounds increases with maturity. | Prepares a simple picture test to identify sounds children have not mastered.<br>Administers test to three children | Attend lecture<br>Classroom observations<br>Read professional references |
| * (Several other competences for each level are listed in original model) | | |
| Advanced Level<br>Knows the sequence in which consonant sounds are learned as shown by research and identifies immature speech and speech defects that interfere with communication | Demonstrates the use of a packet of diagnostic materials developed for classroor.<br>Performs on test<br>Prepares a chart on normal consonant articulation development by chronological age<br>Prepares a tape which illustrates differences between immature speech and acceptable speech dialect | Locate sequence in professional reference<br>Read current research<br>Confer with speech therapist<br>Listen to tapes and records which illustrate immature speech, speech defects, and regional speech dialects |
| Specialization Level<br>Demonstrates a knowledge of classification of speech defects that can be cared for by the classroom teacher and those that require specialized help | Prepares a checklist of speech problems and simple aids for classroom teachers<br>Prepares a bulletin section on on speech defects | Study checklists<br>Conference with speech consultant<br>Review standardized speech tests<br>Read professional references |

* IRA Publication Modular Preparation for Teaching Reading PP. 92-93

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In summary, in light of demands from our rapidly changing society, the need to revitalize and renovate teacher education through competency-based programs is long overdue. Educational institutions must be ready to reach beyond traditional programs of inservice and preservice instruction if we are to succeed in our thrust toward excellence in educational programs for our teachers of reading.

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